



Chief Executive's Department
Town Hall
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12th June 2020

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Guidance for Places of Worship

Dear Faith and Community Leader,

We're writing to you regarding the current situation on guidance for the phases of extending the opening of all Places of Worship.

As we are sure you are aware, the government has now indicated that it will be permitted for places of worship in England to open to members of the public for **'private prayer'** from Monday 15th June.

Guidance has been issued to support this and includes recommendations of measures to reduce transmission, including:

- Cleaning
- Facilities for hand washing
- Social distancing
- No sharing of items (e.g. hymn books, prayer mats)

It is important to emphasise that it will not be permitted to have any congregational services or communally led prayer, worship or devotion such as services, evensong, informal prayer meetings, Mass, Jummah or Kirtan.

It will still not be permitted for places of worship to hold baptisms, weddings, supplementary schools, meetings or classes, or be open to tourists. It has previously been indicated that services might be permitted at some point in July, but this – as all lockdown is easing – depends on the ongoing progress with the reduction in COVID-19 infection in England, and also at a local level.

You as faith leaders know well that the decision to open a place of worship, is a balance of risk and ultimately up to individual places of worship.

As always, you will need to take responsibility for this decision and ensuring the safety of your congregation as a part of the wider community.

From a public health perspective, the role of places of worship in the wellbeing of communities must be balanced very carefully with the risk of infection, especially amongst vulnerable people where we know infection is more likely to be severe.

The rates of new cases per 100,000 people in Bedfordshire and Luton are the highest in the East of England region, so we need to remain particularly cautious locally. Because of this, we wanted to emphasise to you directly that the council's public health team are advising a very cautious approach to re-opening places of worship.

We know that coronavirus has a disproportionate effect on parts of our community, including older people, people living in more deprived areas, people with underlying conditions and people of BAME heritage. Places of worship should think carefully about whether people using their setting fall into these groups as part of their risk assessment around re-opening.

Each place of worship should therefore ensure they have a thorough and detailed risk assessment of whether they can safely prevent infection, and what steps they would be required to take if there was a case of Covid-19 within their congregation, before deciding whether or not to open.

To this end, we have attached some additional guidance prepared by our public health team. There are also some excellent resources prepared by national faith bodies which we would strongly encourage you to refer to fully whilst considering your decision. Luton Council of Mosques and the Sunni Council of Mosques in Luton have also issued a statement regarding the importance of not encouraging or allowing congregational prayer of any kind under the current guidance, which we of course welcome as well.

We are very much aware that during the period of lockdown in the UK, places of worship have had to take the unprecedented and painful action of closing their doors and ending the usual communal worship that forms the heart of many people's lives.

We continue to thank you for all your support to keep our community safe and well, and ensure their health and wellbeing.

With best wishes,

Yours faithfully



Councillor Hazel Simmons MBE
Leader
Luton Borough Council



Councillor Jacqueline Burnett
Executive Member
Safer, Stronger Communities